



# *CITY COUNCIL*

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## *Public Safety Committee*

**Monday, October 3, 2011**  
**Council Office**  
**5 p.m.**

**Committee Members Attending:** D. Sterner, Chair, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Waltman

**Others Attending:** L. Kelleher, T. Butler, C. Geffken, R. Natale, W. Heim, K. Kulp

### **I. Citizen's Service Center: Implementation Update**

Mr. Geffken stated that the Administration is currently working with a vendor to make physical improvements to the Citizen's Service Center (CSC). He stated that this project will combine staff from Treasury with the CSC employees. He stated that no written CSC report is available this evening but promised to provide one next week. He stated that CSC employees continue training on various issues.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested integrating the CSC with the new United Way 311 Service.

### **Quality of Life Ticketing Update**

Mrs. Kelleher distributed the report provided by Mr. Kersley.

Mr. Geffken stated that to date tickets totaling \$498K have been issued. The majority of the tickets were issued for high weeds and accumulation for trash and rubbish. He stated that only \$186,810 in fees have been paid to date. He also stated that 64% of the appeals have been granted to date.

He stated that District breakdown for ticketing is as follows:

- District 5 – 2,569 tickets
- District 2 – 2,513 tickets
- District 3 – 2,331 tickets
- District 6 – 1,875 tickets
- District 4 – 1,759 tickets

- District 1 – 912 tickets

Mr. Natale stated that reminders have been sent to those who have not paid their ticket as of yet. He stated that the letter is sent prior to moving the unpaid fees to collection.

Mr. Waltman suggested integrating the Quality of Life ticket program with a Clean and Lean program.

Mr. Natale stated that Quality of Life Inspectors have now been through every City neighborhood one (1) time. He stated that he expects a reduction in the number of tickets issued during the next round. He reported that the Quality of Life inspectors have seen an improvement in property conditions due to the ticketing.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that many neighborhoods have improved due to the ticketing program. She suggested viewing the program as the first cycle has been completed. She noted the need to educate residents on their responsibility for alley maintenance and storage of recycling and trash containers. She noted her overall belief in the need to educate citizens.

Mr. Natale agreed with the need to review the program. He expressed the belief that the largest problem with the Quality of Life ticketing ordinance is its effect on properties without alley access or Baker alley access. He stated that moving forward the Codes office will send postcards warning areas when sweeps will occur. He also stated that the Solid Waste Manager has sent out letters informing residents about storage for trash and recycling receptacles. Ms. Kelleher suggested stickers similar to those used for permitted dumpsters be provided to residents who do not have Baker alley or alley access.

Mr. Spencer noted the allegations that the appeal process is improper. Mr. Younger stated that the Law Department believes that the process is proper and provides due process. He suggested that those complaining about the appeal process provide specifics.

In regard to trash and recycling receptacle tickets, Mr. Natale stated that Codes Inspectors only issue tickets a minimum of two (2) days before collection day. Mr. Waltman also noted the need to address its litter problem. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Mr. Sterner suggested having a review meeting at either a Committee of the Whole Meeting or Work Session.

### **Update on Property Maintenance Code & Plumbing Code**

Ms. Butler distributed a draft ordinance that will amend the ICC (International Code Council) ordinance by adding a variety of things including the issues that support the Blighted Property process. She explained that the Council will be asked to adopt the 2012 ICC version. She stated that she is currently seeking the ability to purchase a license which will allow her to merge the proposed amendments with the copyrighted text of the ICC ordinance. She noted the difficulty in using the ICC ordinance with a separate amendment. She noted that other cities purchased the license so they can integrate local regulations. She stated that the ordinance should be ready for

introduction in 2-4 weeks.

### **Housing & Zoning**

Ms. Kelleher stated that the draft Housing Permit ordinance and Zoning amendment have been introduced. She stated that a Committee has been working since the spring to prepare amendments to the Housing Permit ordinance. She stated that the City's outside legal counsel, Steve Welz, recommends amending the Zoning ordinance to provide the Zoning Administrator with the ability to clear properties from the backlog that have had consistent rental registration permits throughout a defined period. She also stated that Mr. Welz also recommends amending the Zoning ordinance to include Conditional Use procedures, which includes Council's ability to have a Hearing Officer or one (1) member of Council conduct the Conditional Use hearings. She stated that approximately one-half (1/2) of the 1,400 properties will require Conditional Use approval. She stated that it is believed that a majority of these properties will be two (2) and three (3) unit properties. She suggested that those properties go to hearings conducted by either a Hearing Officer or an individual member of Council. She also suggested the full body of Council can do Conditional Use hearings for those with more than four (4) units. She stated that Mr. Kersley will provide a breakdown of properties that fall in both categories and Council can then consider the work impact. She also noted that the change in the Zoning Administrator's duties only be effective until the back log is corrected. She stated that the issue will be reviewed in a Committee of the Whole session on either Monday, October 10<sup>th</sup> or Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>.

In regard to the Housing registration and inspection fees, Mr. Geffken stated that the rental registration fee will be reduced to \$100 per parcel and the inspection fee will start at \$504 for one (1) and two (2) units. He noted that the rental registration fee be applied to the entire parcel, not the individual unit. He noted that that reduction will reduce rental registration revenue from \$1.5M to \$875K annually.

Mr. Natale stated that he and Ms. Kelleher determined that the \$100 per unit rental registration fee covered the permitting fee plus the cost of the inspection over a three (3) to four (4) year cycle. He noted that the average property will save approximately \$90 per parcel over the inspection cycle period.

### **Public Safety at City Schools**

Mr. Denbowski stated that a meeting has been arranged with the acting School Superintendent regarding the availability of a grant from the National Center for Safe Routes To School. He stated that the grant is not available until October 5<sup>th</sup>. He stated that the grant in the amount of \$10K can be used to explore safe school corridors with the Reading School District as the primary applicant.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to consider providing safe havens along school corridors before and after school.

Mr. Denbowski stated that coordination must also occur with crossing guards and their locations.

He explained that the National Center for Safe Routes To School to school allotted Pennsylvania \$100K which will provide \$10K grants to ten (10) cities.

### **Fire Update**

Chief Kulp stated that things are working well in the Fire Department. He described the assistance from surrounding municipalities during recent fire events.

There was a discussion on several suspicious fires within the City.

Mr. Sterner inquired about the upgrade of fire houses. Chief Kulp stated that the upgrades are moving forward. He stated that mold remediation is scheduled to begin. He stated that roof repairs at the 9<sup>th</sup> and Marion station are planned; however he noted that the contractor retained reneged on the existing contract.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the process to follow-up after fire events. Mr. Natale stated that when property insurance is in place the City receives fire escrow funds which are returned to the property owner after rehab or demo is complete. He stated that the Codes office is also exploring their ability to retain fire escrow fees in cases where delinquent Municipal fees and taxes exist.

Chief Kulp noted that the delays in concluding the 9<sup>th</sup> and Marion fire house could leave Northeast Reading in jeopardy, as it's closest Fire Station would be either Spring and McKnight or Eighth and Court. He suggested the consolidation of three (3) additional fire houses.

### **Police Update**

Chief Heim stated that the Reading Police Department is holding its own with less than 160 Officers. He stated that the Department expects to be down to 140 Officers by year end. He noted the nine (9) month training period for new hires (5 months at the Academy and 4 months in field training). He stated that the 2011 budget contains funding for 164 Police Officers.

Ms. Kelleher noted that the 2012 Budget shows no reduction in Patrol manpower; however a reduction in Supervisors and Command staff is planned.

Chief Heim stated that the City cannot receive assistance from other sources such as the State Police as they do not have the man power necessary to supplement City Patrol. He also noted that the Berks County Sheriff's Department does not have the required training and statutory authority to provide assistance to the Reading Police force.

The Public Safety Committee meeting adjourned at approximately 7:03 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*